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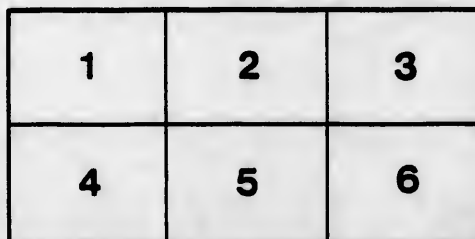
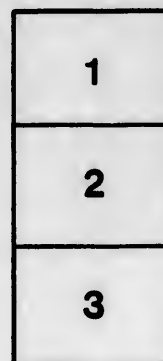
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Defects in our Public School System.

BY A. McMILLAN, TORONTO.

(Being a paper read at the Thirty-Third Annual Convention of the Ontario
Educational Association, held in the Education Department Buildings,
Toronto, March 27th, 28th and 29th, 1894.)



GUELPH, Oct. 2, 1894.

DEAR SIR,—The Public School Department of the Ontario Educational Association, having heard at its last annual meeting the accompanying address from the chairman, attached so much importance to it, as embodying their views on the place our Public Schools should occupy and on the defects of our Public School system, that they unanimously expressed a wish that all who took a vital interest in the welfare of the Public Schools of this Province might have an opportunity of reading it.

The Department is fairly representative of the Public School teachers of the Province.

The paper was favorably and enthusiastically received by a large assemblage and referred to a committee.

The Committee brought in the following report, which after full discussion, was unanimously adopted.

Trusting that the address and the report may receive your earnest consideration,

I am, dear sir, your obedient servant,

D. YOUNG,

Sec. P. S. Dept., Ont. Educ. Assn.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE *re* PAPER ON "DEFECTS IN
OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM."

The Committee begs leave to call special attention to the following points made by Mr. McMillan :

1. That while education is, and to some extent, should be, utilitarian, it should aim at the moral, intellectual and æsthetic training of the individual.

2. Owing to the fact that legislation in our Province has, for some time, been largely in the interests of High Schools, which constitute but five per cent. of our school population, our Public Schools, which comprise the remaining ninety-five per cent., have been far from receiving the support at the hands of the Legislature which their importance demands.

The Committee begs to recommend the adoption of the following resolutions :

1. That as an important means of remedying the defects pointed out in the paper, no one should receive a professional certificate who has not had at least two years' training in the practical work of the school-room.

2. That the training of pupils in our Public Schools is too important to be made subsidiary to High School work.

3. That every child is entitled to all the training which our Public School system is capable of giving apart from mere utilitarian considerations ; and that, if any class of schools is to receive special encouragement from the Legislature, it is that which devotes itself to the education of the masses.

The Committee would strongly recommend that the Public School teachers of the Province do their utmost to influence public opinion with a view to the improvement of the Public School system in the direction Mr. McMillan has pointed out, and to this end we would also recommend the publication of the paper in pamphlet form, so that everyone interested in the Public Schools of this Province may have an opportunity of reading it.

DEFECTS IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

Our school system is a fruitful theme for panegyric. Visitors from the Old World and the New speak of it in terms of unstinted praise, and we need not doubt their sincerity. Have we not free Public Schools at almost every door, with an army of trained teachers? Have we not a very complete system of High Schools; and, to crown all, a university which is the pride of every Canadian? With this evidence before us, it would seem rash to say anything which could be construed as a reflection on any part of our system. Yet, educational systems, like all else, obey the laws of evolution. In their growth and development they are susceptible to environment, and are liable, at times, like other things, to exhibit unhealthy tendencies. Pruning and training may be necessary here, as in the growth of the tree. We do well, in educational matters, as in business, to take stock occasionally that we may know how we stand. I have, therefore, no apology to make for what may be regarded as a stricture on some phases of our school system—a system which we are pleased to say merits to a large extent the confidence of the people.

In dealing with the subject it will be necessary, following the line which I propose, to refer to our school system as it relates to the Public and High Schools, and in doing so permit me to observe that the most palpable defects of our Public Schools are due partly to a wrong conception of what the Public Schools are for, and partly to an undue predominance of the High School in our system.

Let me here disclaim any desire to reflect unfavorably on our High Schools. We all know the zeal and intelligence which characterize their management and work. Of all that pertains to them apart from their relation to the Public Schools, I have nothing to say. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that the tendency of our educational policy is to magnify the High Schools at the expense of the Public Schools. If this is capable of demonstration, then no false delicacy should enjoin silence. It is too serious to be ignored. The importance of the Public Schools cannot be too strongly urged. The Public School, it has been well said, is the University of the masses. This definition gives us at once the correct conception of the Public School. Ninety-five per cent. of all in attendance at school belong to it. Their education begins and ends here. It is, therefore, a truism to assert that, for weal or for woe, the influence of the Public School on our national life far outweighs all other influences.

But, let me ask, is the Public School fulfilling its mission? To answer this, we must first define the scope of the work assigned to it, and then inquire whether it is adequately equipped for doing this work. There are, as you know, two theories, to some extent conflicting, as to the duty of the State in the matter of education. One maintains the right of the State to provide for such education only

as will enable its citizens to provide the means of existence, and is commonly called the utilitarian or materialistic theory. The other, recognizing that man is something more than material, holds that culture should be the basic element in education. The mean between these appears not only the most rational, but that which at present is most in favor. Surely it will not be urged that purely utilitarian views should prevail in our Public Schools, where, as already stated, ninety-five per cent. of our population receive all their school training. Were this granted, what more effective means could be devised for creating and perpetuating in a democratic country, class distinctions? Thus would we adopt in the New World the almost effete systems of the Old. This, it need scarcely be added, would not harmonize with the spirit of modern civilization. If the masses are to govern, then must they be educated, and that education must be in keeping with the requirements of the age. The fact must not be overlooked, that, within recent years, great advances have been made in science, in government, as well as in the social conditions of the people, and that an educational standard adapted to primitive conditions of society will scarcely meet the demands of the present, much less the future. While it is necessary that our Public Schools should furnish a good, sound training in the instrumentary branches—the three R's, for example—it does not follow that the line should be drawn here. The complexities of modern civilization call for more than this. To be more specific, I venture the opinion that our Public Schools should furnish not only a thorough training in the three R's, but some definite knowledge of the history of our race, with its geography—some practical knowledge of elementary science, the advances in which have in recent years done so much to revolutionize the industrial, the commercial, and the social life of the world; and not least, though last, should, as far as possible, lay the foundation of a taste for the language and literature of the mother-tongue.

But, it may be answered, that our system already makes provision for this, or the greater part of it. Theoretically, it does in part; practically, it does not. The average schoolboy receives more training in the solution of complex problems in arithmetic than in expertness in applying the first principles of the subject to practical purposes. He is, as a rule, well stocked with the mere technicalities of English grammar, but he has little facility in the correct use—either in speaking or writing—of the mother-tongue. His knowledge of the fundamental laws of science—the operations of which might daily constitute for him simple object lessons—is practically *nil*. Why stones are heavy, why a piece of wood floats in the water, does not, as a rule, excite his curiosity. Then, as to his taste in reading, is it not too often accurately gauged by the thirst which he betrays for stories of a sensational or blood-curdling character, or for those columns of the newspaper which contain the captivating details of the most recent “slugging” match? In a word, the majority of our

young people leave school with very inadequate preparation for the ordinary duties of life, much less for the duties of citizenship.

What, then, is the cause of this? While it may not be due solely to what has already been suggested, viz., our lowered conception of the Public Schools as a result of the overshadowing influences of the High School, yet this enters largely into the question. In a paper read by Mr. Reazin before the General Association last year, the injurious effects of the Entrance Examination were forcibly pointed out, and the more we consider his statement of the case, the more fully are we convinced that his position is unassailable.

Since the Public Schools must furnish all the education which ninety-five per cent. of our population receives, why should the course of training in these schools be in any way subordinated to the requirements of the High Schools? Why should the ninety-five per cent. suffer for the five per cent.? This is where we have erred. We are absolutely dominated by the High School idea. In our desire—no doubt an honest one, though very short-sighted—to preserve *unity* in our system, and to give it a finely-rounded appearance, we have overlooked the fact that the *Public Schools were not created for the High Schools, but for the people*. While we have been congratulating ourselves on the perfect harmony of all the parts of the system, we have been working serious injury to its most vital part. Not only our programme of studies, but the scope of our teaching has been conformed to this one ideal—utterly fallacious, it is true, yet absolutely overmastering. Should not our Public School system in itself be regarded as a distinct entirety without any special regard to High School requirements? Why should the Entrance Examination be made the “be all” and the “end all” of the Public School course? There would be some justification for a policy so one-sided as this, if it were true that any appreciable number of our school population continued their education in the High School. Of late we sometimes hear the term “Primary Schools” applied to our Public Schools, and this is significant as showing the tendency in certain quarters to degrade the true status of the Public Schools. By what authority, then, has the true aim of Public School education been thus perverted? Surely this is not the conception of the system which its founder entertained. Somebody is responsible for this, and although it may not be easy to locate the responsibility, I venture to say that it is not enlightened public opinion.

Not only is it the case that in this way the true status of the Public School has been lowered, but we are doing nothing towards increasing its efficiency within the narrower limits by which it has been circumscribed.

According to the Report of the Minister of Education for 1891, there were 8,336 teachers in the Public Schools. Of this number, 255 were first class, 2,999 second, 4,274 third, and 812 nondescript—the latter two combined exceeding the former two by 1,836, while

the third class alone exceeded the first and second combined by 1,024. In other words, sixty-one per cent. of all our teachers possess the minimum or lowest qualification. It is not necessary to remind you of the nature of this qualification—that it is covered by passing the primary or lowest examination in the High School, with a very short grind at the County Model School. It will not be denied that the teacher should be possessed of some breadth and culture—a model not simply for his class, but for the community in which he moves. Will anyone seriously assert that the average primary certificate necessarily represents sufficient culture for the teacher? If so, it should be remembered that the standard for admission as a student to our University is from one to three years in advance of this. Surely the times demand more than a mere modicum of culture in those charged with the education of the people. Model School masters of long experience have informed me that, not unfrequently, candidates for the Model School are sadly deficient in orthography.

Then, apart from literary culture, consider the pedagogical outfit of the average graduate of the Model School. If we add to his meagre literary attainments, his youth and immaturity, his almost total ignorance of mental science, either theoretical or acquired, it is not surprising that a short term in the Model can do but little for his pedagogical equipment.

It will scarcely be maintained that the work of the teacher—embracing as it does so much of a psychological character—is less delicate, less intricate, or less easy of mastery than that of the student of medicine. The latter has to deal mainly with the physical, but the teacher with the mental and moral; therefore successful teaching demands talent of as high order and as much training as success in medicine. But imagine a medical profession composed largely of members who have barely any preparation for their calling beyond that which is furnished by their entrance examination. Or imagine the practice of law monopolized by students who have just gained admission to the Law Society.

But this is not all nor even the worst phase of the question. Granted that the teacher has literary culture and professional training, a very important, if not the chief, aid to success is experience. What do the statistics say in this respect? During the last fifteen years, 18,281 candidates passed the examination for Third-class certificates. This, let me say in passing, was ninety-five per cent. of the whole number in attendance at the Model Schools. During the same period of fifteen years, there have been in attendance at the Normal Schools 5,958 students in training. There are no figures as to the number of successful candidates here, but the percentage is probably little below that of the Model Schools. By some mysterious law of selection, it so happens that nearly all candidates for these examinations are adjudged competent, after a very short period of

training, to enter the ranks. But what becomes of this large army of recruits? For the fifteen years already mentioned, the total increase of teachers in actual service was 1,868, or a yearly average of 125. To supply this increase of 125, we have the annual output of the Model Schools, numbering an average of 1,200. Need we ask why 1,200 new teachers are annually required to fill 125 positions? The death rate among teachers, we are informed, is not higher than the average. We know where they go. With humiliation it must be owned they go to swell the exodus from a calling which has no future for men possessed of sturdy intellect and laudable ambition. They go, too, when they have remained barely long enough to make their stay anything more than a mere apprenticeship. Why should they wish to remain with us? The talents, energy, and perseverance necessary for success in teaching will, in other callings, bring much richer rewards.

Consider for a moment the inducements which teaching offers. The average salary of male teachers throughout the Province, in 1891, was \$423. The minister's report presented recently in the Legislature makes it less for 1892. In the fifteen years prior to 1891, the average salary of male teachers increased but \$16. It is lower now than during the five years immediately preceding 1889. Some time ago the city council of Toronto adopted a by-law fixing the minimum wages of corporation laborers at fifteen cents an hour, and no one will assert that this is too high. Yet it is a fact that with steady employment the earning capacity of the corporation laborer at this rate is quite equal to that of the average male teacher, and considerably in excess of that of the female teacher. It may have been the laborer's misfortune never to have entered a school; he may not know how to read or write, yet his earning capacity may equal that of his unfortunate brother, who, instead of plying his avocation with pick and shovel, has elected to tread the thorny path of pedagogy.

It may be urged that the public will not endorse increased expenditure for education. In 1877 the total cost per pupil of public school education was \$6.26; in 1891 it was \$8.34, an increase of 33 per cent. The advance in teachers' salaries during this period being merely nominal, this increase is largely due to other causes, chiefly to a liberal outlay for new buildings, so that while the public has been generous in providing adequate school accommodation it has not shown the same liberality in dealing with the teacher. Why should it, looking at it from a purely business standpoint? Is it not a question of supply and demand? Is there not always a superabundance of raw material available to conduct the education of our youth at an average annual cost of \$5 a head? The average citizen need not be expected to pay as much yearly for his child's education as for the shoes which his child wears, especially as the price of brains in the pedagogical market runs lower than the price of leather.

I have said that this is a question of supply and demand. But

what is the cause of this abnormal demand for cheapness in the teacher? Coincident with the predominance which the High School has acquired in our system has been the elimination of the higher classes from our Public Schools and their absorption into the High Schools. Material must be found to feed these schools, and so, as was well shown in the paper already referred to, came the lowered status of the Public School with its deterioration. Anyone could now teach the babies, a mere boy or girl could fill the bill. Third-class teachers, or rather the apprentices, underbid the higher grade and more experienced teachers, who in many cases quit the field, with the result that we have more third-class teachers to-day than at any time in the past.

This unfair treatment of the Public Schools provoked criticism in the Legislature. A remedy was provided, the chief characteristic of which was its mildness. We were given the Public School Leaving Examination, but as its ostensible purpose was to benefit the Public Schools, it must cost nothing. *And it did not.* The rigorous conditions attached to it made it perfectly safe in this respect. However, a little more pressure from those interested in the welfare of the schools led to some relaxation of the conditions, still we are but toying with the evil. The last report from the Education Department gives no particulars regarding the operations of the Leaving Examination for last year. It is known, however, that for the whole Province probably less than three hundred certificates were issued and about \$1,000 granted on the conditions which the regulations prescribe. This munificent sum means an average of seventeen cents for each Public School in the Province. But this, it must be remembered, is for the advancement of Public School education.

How different has been the fostering care bestowed upon the High School; and this, too, when public opinion is divided on the question of granting State aid to higher education. As teachers we realize the value of higher education to the State, and it should be our desire to see an efficient High School system maintained. But it should be a system such as the needs of the country demand. Owing to geographical conditions we are necessarily an industrial people, and any system of education which ignores this fact must in the end prove a failure. We need good Public Schools everywhere, but it is doubtful whether we need a High School in every village or on every cross-road. We now have one hundred and twenty-six, and many believe that fewer schools well equipped would suffice. Even then we should be better supplied than most, if not all, other civilized nations.

Massachusetts ranks high in education—higher, perhaps, than any other state in the Union. In the matter of High School education this is emphatically so. For the whole of the United States there are but 33 High Schools sufficiently well equipped to prepare candidates for admission to the leading colleges, and of these Massachusetts has 25. Though her population is greater than ours we have five times

as many High Schools. While she has one for every 90,000 of her population; we have one for every 16,400. If the comparison be carried further the disproportion becomes vastly greater.

This multiplication of High Schools, apart from its injurious effects upon our Public Schools, has not been without bad results in other directions. Many are attracted to the High School whose usefulness would be enhanced by a good Public School training, but with the craze for the so-called genteel occupations, which seems everywhere prevalent, they take a course in the High School, and leave it to still further swell the ranks of professions already overcrowded. The larger proportion, however, take a short course, receive a modicum of preparation, and at once, or all too soon, blossom out as teachers. It may not be fair to charge this solely to the High Schools, but it will not be denied that our copious system of High Schools offers facilities for perpetuating the most flagrant defect of our Public Schools, viz., the transitory character of the teacher's calling.

I have referred to the Leaving Examination as an instance of the generous treatment which the Public Schools have received from the Legislature. That we may view more fully the contrast in the treatment of our High Schools, let me quote the following figures:

In 1891, there were registered in the Public Schools, 491,741 pupils, and the total legislative grant for the year was \$289,610 or 58 cents for each registered pupil; the grant for 1892 being several thousand dollars less than that for 1891. In the same year, 1891, there were registered in the High Schools, 22,230 pupils, but the legislative grant was nearly \$100,000, only \$300 less, or \$4.48 per pupil. There are no figures showing the additional grants to High Schools on the score of equipment, but leaving this out of the calculation it will be seen that the grant per capita is nearly eight times greater for the High Schools. This money, it should be remembered, belongs to the people, all of whom are vitally interested in the Public Schools, and the great majority of whom are but indirectly interested in the rest of our school system.

The plea usually advanced for this discrimination in favor of High Schools is, that their efficiency must be maintained in order to supply teachers for the Public Schools. Bearing in mind what has already been said about the Model Schools, viz., that 1,200 teachers are annually turned out from them to fill positions, which, with anything like adequate safeguards for their protection, should not number more than 200; bearing further in mind the fact that a large proportion of the 1,200 put in but a brief and perfunctory apprenticeship to the business, and while still prentice hands forsake the calling, making way for the new army of recruits; bearing still further in mind what has been said regarding the undue stimulus which the omnipresence of the High School has given to aspirants for genteel occupations, how transparently fallacious does this plea become! Is

it not the sheerest mockery to urge that this is in the interest of the Public Schools? Increased expenditure may be justified on other grounds, certainly not on this. Our High Schools could even, if made largely self-sustaining, furnish many more than the necessary number of teachers, and this, too, with little fear that some "flower might be born to blush unseen."

This degradation of the people's schools has gone on with such constancy that it has become familiar and has ceased to excite wonder. True, we have deplored it and have recognized the blighting influence, but, apparently, we have become convinced that it is inevitable. This is where we most seriously err. Silence on our part implies either want of faith in ourselves or indifference, not only to our calling but to the interests of the schools.

I confess that it is easier to point out these defects than to provide a remedy which will be at once feasible and effective. Evils that have been allowed to grow without any adequate attempts to curtail them, do not readily yield except to heroic treatment. Yet the status of the teacher, or in other words the condition of the schools—the one determines the other—is a matter vital to the State, and the State, which means the people, will in this, as in other questions, look for light to those who are specially concerned in the work and welfare of the schools, and who are in a position to give expert testimony regarding the same. The public is to blame only so far as apathy on its part permits the continuance of evils, the existence of which has been clearly pointed out. It should be borne in mind that the average citizen is better fitted to judge of matters pertaining to his own particular avocation than to questions which may be foreign to it. Here then is a field for effort. If we shirk the responsibility which the situation imposes on us, and trust—as I fear we too often do—to our legislative godfathers, then we need not hope for improvement.

I have indicated some of the weakest spots in our system, and likewise some of the contributing causes. There are other defects which are allied to, or spring from those suggested. Let us inform ourselves fully as to the effect upon our schools and teachers of what has been feebly pointed out here. Then our part will be clear.

In conclusion, let me say a word bearing on the relation of the teacher to the State. Is it not strange that the teacher—and think of what this word should suggest—is in the position of a ward to the State? It is difficult to realize how a condition of tutelage can be compatible with the development of true manhood or womanhood. Yet those qualities are expected in the teacher, and rightly so. But do we realize what their absence implies? We may almost say with Shylock, that "Sufferance is the badge of all our tribe," and assuredly we utter nonsense when we speak of teaching as a profession. True, there is no higher work, regarded intrinsically, but look at the conditions which hedge around it. Here then is scope for effort, and in this direction, at least, lie some of our responsibilities. The time has

long since passed when teaching should be something more than a mere temporary convenience for the many at the expense of those who are giving their life to it—something more than the by-word makes it, viz., "A stepping-stone to something better."

With the assurance that springs from a righteous cause, we should insist on such changes as will give more stability, and, therefore, more dignity to the teacher's calling. We can insist on this, too, with the full conviction that it is not only compatible with, but essential to, the highest interests of the community. The conditions now are such that we can and should have a higher standard for entrance to the ranks—higher from the standpoint of age or maturity, higher from the standpoint of literary culture, and higher, too, from the standpoint of professional training.

Of this we may be assured that apathy on our part means the perpetuation of existing evils. If we are convinced that these evils exist, our duty is clear. The words, "Who would be free himself must strike the blow," even if trite, should possess inspiration for us; and if we cannot achieve all we desire, let us for the cause—which, though too often trailed in the dust, is yet noble and dearly loved—transmit to those who follow an improved heritage.

